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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000417

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SA/FO AMBASSADOR QUINN, S/CT, SA/A, G KATE  
FRIEDRICH, G/IWI CHARLOTTE PONTICELLI AND DIANNE GRAHAM  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND  
CENTCOM FOR POLAD, CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76  
TREASURY FOR LMCDONALD, WBALDRIDGE, APARAMESWARAN, ABAUKOL  
STATE PLEASE PASS USAID  
USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: DEBATE BUT NO ACTION IN PARLIAMENT

REF: KABUL 275

Classified By: A/DCM ANGUS SIMMONS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The National Assembly's first week in session after a holiday recess was marked by heated debate over procedures for approval of the Cabinet and travel by Members of Parliament overseas. After initially agreeing to approve the Cabinet Minister by Minister, the Wolesi Jirga (lower house) reversed its decision and postponed a final vote on the matter until after the London Conference. Both houses also spent a significant amount of time debating the composition of delegations to London and the United States. The debate was most heated in the Meshrano Jirga (MJ - upper house), where Speaker Sebghatullah Mojadeddi's delegation choices were rejected in a power play by a large group of MPs. The announced invitation of Meshrano Jirga Deputy Speaker Hamed Gailani to attend the State of the Union Address provoked debate and politicking by members who thought they should select a representative rather than allowing Gailani to accept a White House invitation. The MJ ultimately came around on Gailani's acceptance, but these episodes reflect the strong personality-driven nature of the new National Assembly. END SUMMARY.

Cabinet Approval Decision Delayed  
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12. (SBU) The Wolesi Jirga (WJ) spent two days debating a rule of procedure on how to approve members of the Cabinet - individually or as a slate. After coming to a decision at the end of the first day to approve the Cabinet one by one, the WJ rescinded that decision the next day. Those arguing that Ministers should be reviewed individually stated that this would be the only way to ensure all were qualified, while those advocating a group vote held that slate approval would ensure that the Cabinet confirmation did not fall prey to ethnic politics. Unable to reach a final decision, they postponed further debate on the matter until the week of February 4, when Speaker Yunus Qanooni returns from London.

13. (C) The unlikely duo of ultra-conservative Abdul Rasul Sayaf and outspoken women's activist Shukria Barakzai were the first to challenge the decision to approve the Cabinet individually. Sayaf reportedly later backed down from his position, but the slate option appears to remain the preference of the Pashtun block in Parliament, possibly with some Hazara support. Whichever method is ultimately chosen, various ministers are certain to face a difficult time in front of the Parliament. Even if the approval is done as a group, Parliament has the right to interpellate ministers on an as needed basis.

14. (C) Despite Speaker Qanooni's efforts to move the WJ toward organizing committees, little progress was made on this front. Formation of political groups must precede committee selection (REFTEL), and members seem reluctant to tie themselves to a single faction at this time. Many argued during floor debate that more time is needed to get to know fellow MPs. Some MPs confessed during meetings with POLOFFs that they do not yet have enough support to meet the 21-member requirement to form a group. Yet other members are very confident that they have large blocs of supporters in the Parliament and claim they can easily control enough MPs to establish political groups. There is no lack of claims one way or the other, but there is little discussion of political philosophy. The political groupings, at least initially, may simply end up like so many of Afghanistan's political parties, support groups for individual MPs who have power and money.

Meshrano Jirga MPs Challenge Speaker's Authority  
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15. (C) Meshrano Jirga Speaker Mojadeddi faced a more serious test of his leadership. Mojadeddi, who has been in Turkey for the past three weeks for medical treatment, decided from his distant location to name the Meshrano Jirga delegates who

would accompany him to the London Conference. This provoked a burst of protest by some members, who believed that the MPs themselves should select the delegation rather than Mojaddedi. These MPs claim that Mojaddedi was basing his selection purely on personal political criteria rather than on expertise or true representation. Our invitation to Sayed Hamed Gailani, the Meshrano Jirga's Deputy Speaker, to attend the SOU Address provoked similar debate, and the initial reaction from the Meshrano Jirga members was that Gailani should not attend the SOU and that the Mojaddedi-selected delegates should not attend the London Conference.

16. (C) The Meshrano Jirga ultimately approved Mojaddedi's choices for London after three days of debate, but initially voted not to allow Deputy Speaker Hamed Gailani to travel to the United States for the State of the Union Address. Gailani decided to attend the SOU regardless of the MJ decision. There was never any indication that MPs disapproved of the event itself, on the contrary each one of Gailani's critics spoke of his own personal regard for the White House and the US. The Meshrano Jirga MPs were far more embroiled in the question of which of them should go in lieu of Gailani, since they saw the trip as being both very important as well as a major perk. The invitation to Fawzia Koofi from the Wolessi Jirga was handled by WJ staff and MPs in a far less controversial manner. By noon on 30 January, the MJ MPs had calmed down and seemed reconciled to Gailani's attendance at the SOU. We understand they contacted Gailani to inform him that they now are agreed to his attendance, but ordered him "not to stay too long in Washington."

Comment

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17. (C) After several weeks of relative order, the cracks in the facade of a harmonious Parliament are beginning to show. Ethnic divisions do not dominate debate, but in the absence of a formal organization for the Assembly (be it committees or parties) the leadership of Parliament - particularly when they are out of the country - is not always strong enough to move issues in a straightforward manner through either house. With no legislation yet to review, the topic of debate has been who should travel to which overseas meeting, but the purpose of the disagreements has been to flex the muscles of nascent interest groups in the Assembly.

18. (C) The Meshrano Jirga debate in particular shows the current weakness of leadership there. The Speaker and both deputies in the Wolessi Jirga were originally elected to Parliament with clear signs of solid support from their constituencies. The Speaker and his deputies spend long, hard hours at their jobs. Mojaddedi, on the other hand, has not been a presence in Kabul for several weeks, and his opponents clearly resent the fact that he was elected Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga in what some see as a trick. He also continues to head the PTS Taliban reconciliation program, which some would argue is a full-time job. As time passes, it seems likely that Mojaddedi will come under increased attacks from within the Parliament as younger, more dynamic political hopefuls threaten his leadership role. END COMMENT.

NORLAND